
The Western Pacific Railway Company and W-155

William Lesh (#3718)

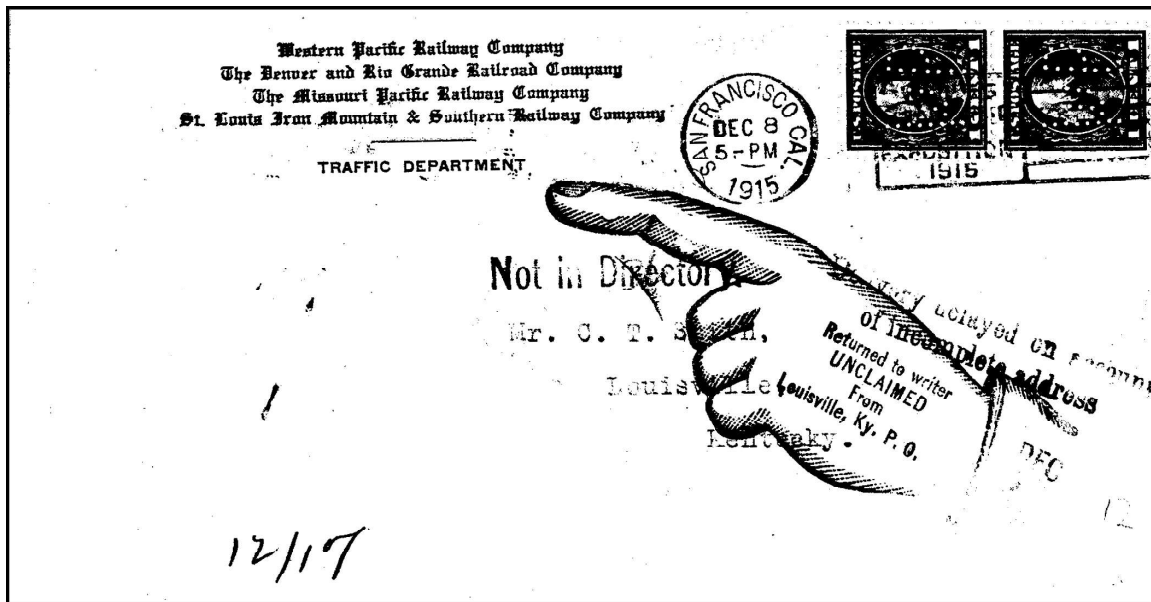
The Western Pacific Railway Co. was incorporated in San Francisco on March 6, 1903. It was part of the Gould Railroad System and a subsidiary of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Co. (US perfin pattern D-153) which had been mortgaged to secure the loan for the WP.

On June 25, 1903, the WP merged with the Alameda & San Joaquin Railroad Co. The A&SJ consisted of 36 miles of track in California running from Stockton via the coal mines of Carbona to the coal-fired electric power plant at Tesla (named for the inventor, Nicola Tesla). Although the WP had 191 miles of track, the A&SJ was the only section that operated for some time.

Construction on the main line through the Sierras

began on Jan. 2, 1906 from Oakland, Ca., and on May 5, 1906 from Salt Lake City, Ut. The Oakland portion headed for Stockton connecting at Carbona with the A&SJ, leaving the portion toward Tesla as a branch line. The latter was abandoned in Jan. 1916.

On Nov. 1, 1909 the lines from Oakland and Salt Lake City met in the Sierras one-half mile west of Keddie, Ca., named for Athur F. Keddie who surveyed the route through the Feather River Canyon where the WP was built in 1867. Nine and one-half miles west of Keddie is Virgilia, named for Virgilia Bogue, daughter of Virgil Bogue Vice President and Chief Engineer of the Western Pacific. Virgilia had been the queen of the Portola Festival in San Francisco in Oct. 1909 and appears on postcards commemorating this event.



Western Pacific Railway Co. cover bearing a pair of #405's with w-155 and dated Dec.8, 1915

The Western Pacific from Salt Lake City to San Francisco via a ferry ("Telephone" or "Edward T. Jeffery" c. 1914) from Oakland was opened for freight on Dec. 1, 1909. Passenger service opened August 18, 1910. From the start the WP carried American Express couriers into California - Wells Fargo country. The first railway post office contract with the USPO came in April 1914.

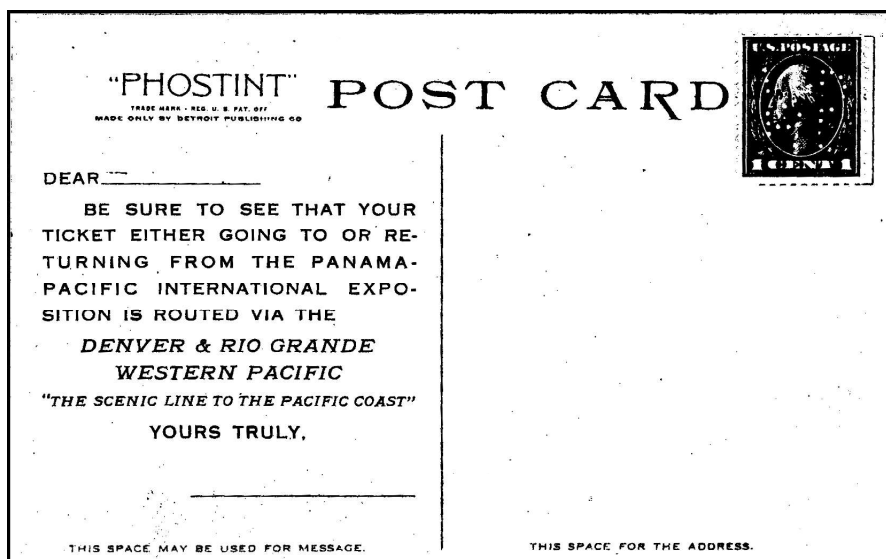
The WP had encountered heavy costs in construction

at Niles Canyon and at the Feather River. Even though it encountered far less snow than the Central Pacific's route through the Sierras the line was under utilized. It could not service its debt and went into receivership on March 1, 1915.

The WP experienced heavy traffic during 1915 and had a special passenger train, the "Panama-Pacific", for the Exposition (Jan. 20 - Dec. 4, 1915) of the same name. It had a special exhibit at the Expo. But

it remained in debt and was sold at foreclosure in Oakland on June 28, 1916. The former bond-holders took possession of the Western Pacific Railway Co.

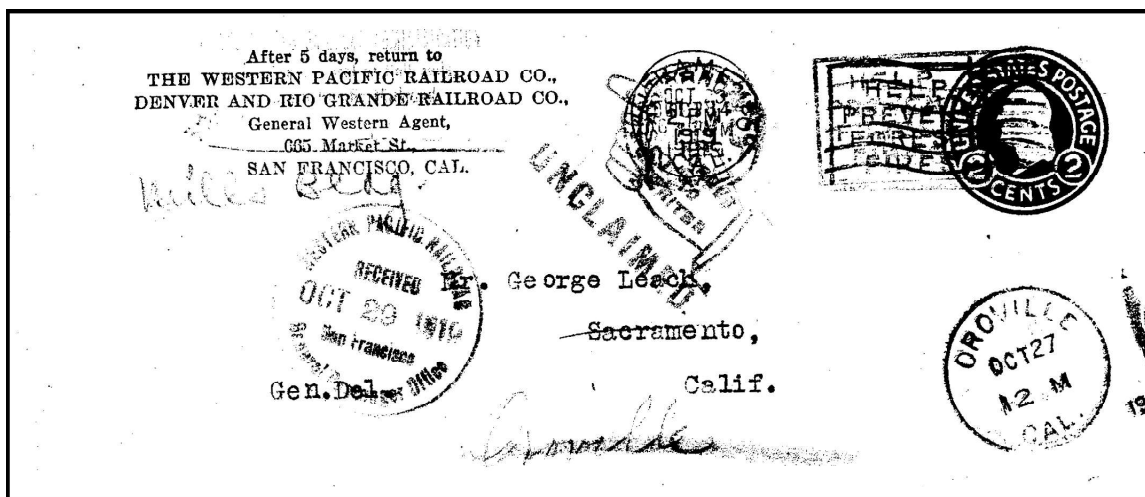
and renamed it the Western Pacific Railroad Corporation.



Unused (and thus undated) postcard with advertising for the WP, the Denver & Rio Grande, and the Panama-Pacific Expo. It bears a #405 with a W-155 perfin. (It would be interesting to know if this postcard exists with the Denver & Rio Grande perfin.)

The United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917. Eight months later on Dec. 28, 1917 the United States Railroad Administration took over the control of all the nations railroads. On July 1, 1918 all domestic express agencies were taken over by the

American Railway Express Company. On March 1, 1920 the railroads became independent businesses again. The expresses were never returned, and some went into banking.



Western Pacific Railroad Co. cover, without perfin, from the U.S. Railroad Administration period, dated Oct. 19, 1919.

The WP would expand over time but always seemed to struggle. It did operate the passenger train the

"California Zephyr", which ran from Mar. 20, 1949 to Mar. 22, 1970. There was also the "Exposition

Flyer” which ran from Oakland to Salt Lake city in 23 hours for the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco (1939-40). The Western Pacific was merged with the Union Pacific Railroad Company (at that time the user of US perfin pattern U-61.5) on

Dec. 22, 1982.

Along with the covers shown, I have a few W-155's off cover in the Panama-Pacific issue, issues of 1917 and the prexies of that era.
